

PROPOSED AMENDMENT

IN THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the present application:

1. (Currently amended) In an online comparison system, a method of ranking prospective merchants, comprising:

entering by a consumer a set of weighting factors prior to receiving query information related to a potential consumer purchase, the weighting factors corresponding to categories of merchant comparison information data;

receiving the query information related to ~~a~~ the potential consumer purchase;

receiving a plurality of merchant comparison information data for a plurality of merchants related to completing the potential consumer purchase, the merchant comparison information data for a merchant organized into a plurality of categories, wherein the merchant comparison information data includes non-opinion data from at least two categories from: price category, product availability category, product inventory category, time to deliver product category, payment terms category, payment method category, merchant creditworthiness category, and inventory category information;

calculating a plurality of respective merchant data weight resultant values for a each merchant of the plurality of merchants by~~[[:]~~;

~~[[i]] for each entered weighting factor, multiplying one each the weighting factor from the entered set of weighting factors against one from the entered set of weighting factors by a data value of the merchant comparison information data from the a corresponding merchant data category~~[[, and]];

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[[(ii)]] calculating an aggregate score for ~~the~~ each merchant by summing the plurality of calculated merchant data weight resultant values;

ranking the merchants based on the ~~merchant~~ aggregate scores to produce a ranking result; and

~~returning the ranked merchants a result of the ranking result~~ to the consumer, the ~~ranked merchants~~ ranking result corresponding to the received query information.

2. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

requesting ~~sending a request for~~ information from a ~~the~~ consumer relating to a potential consumer purchase.

3. (Currently amended) The method of claim 2, further comprising:

providing the ~~ranking~~ ranking result to the consumer in response to the consumer's response to the request for information relating to a potential consumer purchase.

4. (Currently amended) The method of claim 3, further comprising:

~~below a specified threshold~~ excluding a merchant from the ~~ranking~~ ranking result when the merchant receives a ~~an~~ aggregate score below a specified threshold.

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

requesting weighting factor information from a consumer; and

using the consumer entered weighting factor information in the calculation of the respective merchant data weight resultant value.

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6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the weighting factors sum to a predetermined value.
7. (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein the weighting factors are balanced such that the weighting factors sum to a predetermined value.
- 8-13. (Canceled)
14. (Currently amended) A method of ranking prospective merchants in an online comparison system, comprising the steps of:
 - entering by a consumer a set of weighting factors prior to receiving query information related to a potential consumer purchase of a user specified product;
 - receiving the query information relating to said user specified product from the consumer;
 - retrieving a list of merchants from a database, wherein the list of merchants includes merchants offering said user specified product;
 - retrieving merchant specific information about the merchants in said list of merchants, said merchant specific information including a plurality of merchant data entry values, the merchant data entry values specifying-representing non-opinion data;
 - for each merchant in the list of merchants, applying the weighting factors to said a corresponding subset of the merchant specific information, said application including[[:]]
 - [[i)] for each entered weighting factor, for a plurality of said merchant data entry values, multiplying the each of said merchant data entry values by at least one the a corresponding weighting factor from the set of weighting factors to calculate a merchant data weight resultant value, to produce a plurality of merchant data weight resultant values;

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[[~~(ii)~~]] for each merchant in the list of merchants, summing a the corresponding plurality of merchant data weight resultant values to calculate a merchant aggregate score for said each merchant;

ranking said list of merchants ~~carrying said user specified product~~ based on the calculated merchant aggregate scores to produce a ranking result; and

returning ~~the ranked merchants~~ a result of the ranking result to the consumer, the ~~ranked merchants~~ ranking result corresponding to said user specified product, wherein any merchant for which the calculated aggregate score does not satisfy a specified criterion is excluded from the result.

15. (Currently amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the weighting factors are chosen by the ~~user~~ consumer from a preset grouping of weighting factors.

16. (Currently amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the weighting factors are ~~entered~~ specified by the ~~user~~ consumer.

17-19. (Canceled)

20. (Currently amended) The method of claim 14, further comprising the step of eliminating those merchants from the ranking result ~~where if~~ the merchant specific information is incomplete for that merchant.

21. (Currently amended) The method of claim 20, wherein ~~the elimination~~ said eliminating occurs only for merchants whose merchant specific data is incomplete as compared to a predefined screening criterion.

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22. (Currently amended) The method of claim 21, wherein the predefined screening criterion is received from the ~~user~~consumer.

23. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, further comprising the step of excluding from the ranking result comparison information items not common to all merchants in the ranking result.

24-26. (Canceled)

27. (Currently amended) The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:
presenting the ~~user~~consumer with a list of merchant information categories;
receiving ~~user~~consumer selected merchant information categories; and
ranking merchants based upon the selected information categories.

28. ~~(Currently amended) The method of claim 24, further comprising the steps of:~~
~~presenting the ~~user~~consumer with a list of merchant information categories;~~
~~receiving ~~user~~consumer selected merchant information categories; and~~
~~ranking merchants based upon the selected information categories.~~

29. (Canceled)

30. (Currently amended) The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:
receiving category weighting factors from the ~~user~~consumer, wherein category weighting factors are applied to all comparison information corresponding to the category in the merchant specific information; and
ranking merchants according to the received category weighting factors.

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31-35. (Canceled)

36. (Currently amended) A method of ranking merchants in an online comparison system, comprising:

receiving from a consumer a set of weighting factors prior to receiving query information specifying a product or service, the weighting factors corresponding to categories of merchant comparison information, wherein ~~the~~ each said weighting factor is entered as a numerical value and represents the relative importance to be given ~~the to~~ corresponding merchant comparison information in ranking the merchants;

receiving the query information related to a product or service from the consumer;

retrieving ~~the~~ merchant comparison information data of merchants offering said product or service from a database, the retrieved merchant comparison information data corresponding to the entered query information, the merchant comparison information excluding opinion data ~~or~~ and survey result data;

calculating a plurality of weighted category scores for each merchant ~~merchant score by~~;

(i) ~~for a plurality of entered~~ each of the weighting factors, multiplying ~~a the~~ weighting factor by a corresponding data value ~~from~~ of the retrieved merchant comparison information data to calculate a weighted category score, and

(ii) ~~summing~~ the weighted category scores to calculate a merchant overall score of each merchant;

ranking the merchants according to the calculated merchant overall score of each merchant to produce a ranking result; and

returning ~~the ranked merchants~~ the ranking result of the ranking to the consumer, the ~~ranked merchants~~ ranking result corresponding to the received query information.

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37. ~~(Canceled)~~ The method of claim 36, wherein the step of entering the weighting factors occurs prior to entering the query.

38. ~~(Canceled)~~ ~~(Currently amended)~~ The method of claim 36, wherein the step of entering the weighting factors is performed by a user, the user also entering and the query information are specified by the consumer.

39. (Currently amended) A method of ranking merchants in an online comparison system, comprising:

selecting, by a consumer, a plurality of weighting factor factors prior to receiving query information specifying a product or service, the weighting factors corresponding to merchant comparison information;

receiving the query information related to specifying a product or service from the consumer;

retrieving the merchant comparison information of merchants offering said product or service from a database, the retrieved merchant comparison information corresponding to the entered query information;

calculating a plurality of weighted category scores for each merchant merchant score by:

(i) for each of the elected selected weighting factors, multiplying the selected weighting factor by a data value from of the retrieved merchant comparison information to calculate a weighted category score, and

(ii) summing the weighted category scores to calculate the merchant score of each merchant;

ranking the merchants according to the calculated merchant score of each merchant to produce a ranking result, wherein the retrieved merchant comparison

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information excludes information obtained from surveys ~~or~~ and information specifying the opinion of a person; and

returning ~~the a result of the ranking result of merchants~~ to the consumer, the ~~ranked merchants~~ ranking result corresponding to the query specifying a product or service.

40. (Canceled) The method of claim 39, ~~wherein the step of selecting the weighting factors occurs prior to entering the query.~~

41. (Currently amended) The method of claim 39, wherein the ~~step of selecting the weighting factors is performed by a user, the user also entering and~~ the query information are specified by the consumer.

42. (Currently amended) The method of claim 39, wherein the weighting factors are selected by the consumer from a list of weighting factors.

43. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, wherein the list of weighting factors corresponds to the merchant information.

44. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein the selection is made from a drop down list of weighting factors.

45. (Currently amended) The method of claim 42, wherein the consumer ~~user may~~ can modify the selected weighting factors to enter a weighting factor not included in the list of weighting factors.

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46. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, wherein the list of weighting factors is entered by a ~~a~~the consumer.

47. (Currently amended) The method of claim 42, wherein the list of weighting factors is selected by the consumer from a group of lists of weighting factors.

48-55. (Canceled)